

## BRIDGE TO COLLEGE



Staff photo by MICHAEL S. GORDON

Laurette R. St. George-Sorel, left, an adjunct professor at Holyoke Community College, teaches English 101 to students in the Bridge to College program at the Palmer Public Library in the offices of Top Floor Learning. The students, from left, are Cynthia D. LaBombard, of Ware, Benjamin S. Lukas, of Sturbridge, Heather M. Allen, of Ware, and Tammy L. LaValley, of Ware.

# Program offers college gateway

**Top Floor Learning wants students to move beyond passing the GED test.**

By **NANCY H. GONTER**  
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**PALMER** - It has always been Cindy D. LaBombard's dream to go to college and now she has realized it.

LaBombard, of Ware, has raised her children and done office work full time. Now, she is taking English 101, a Hol-

yoke Community College class being taught through Top Floor Learning's Bridge to College program.

"I wanted to go to college all my life and this is my opportunity," LaBombard said. She will turn 63 in August and said during a break in a recent class, "This is my opportunity to get my education and im-

prove my writing."

LaBombard plans to attend Holyoke Community to become certified in medical billing and coding as well as to obtain an associate's degree in writing or history.

The Bridge to College program, started in September, began with the realization that people who got their GED needed to move on to get college education so they can be financially independent, said Margaret A. Boyko, chief ex-

ecutive officer of Top Floor Learning, an adult education center based at the Palmer Public Library.

Fifteen people started the program in the fall, learning about study skills, time management and self-advocacy, and at the end of the semester nine were placed into the English class, she said.

"This is a very important achievement for all con-

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cerned, for Top Floor Learning which has realized an important goal of being able to take our GED student to the next level," Boyko said.

Students in the program said it has made college an attainable goal for them.

"It's amazing. It's improved my writing skills. I'm more focused. It's worked as a transition in life," said Patty Ehlers, of Hampden.

Heather M. Allen, 18, also of Ware, who has an 18-month-old daughter and is 8 months pregnant, said the program is getting her started on her goal to become a nurse.

"If I wasn't here, I'd just be an at-home mom. This is the one day a week I use to get my

education. It's gotten me started," Allen said.

Ryan F. Sinclair, a 2003 graduate of Ware High School who has worked in construction, said this is the first step for him toward going to college.

"English hasn't been my favorite subject. This is a nice, small class. It gets really hands-on. These are some of the best grades I ever got in school. The only ever place I got an A before was in gym," Sinclair said.

Professor Laretta R. St. George-Sorel said she wants her students to succeed in their first experience with college-level classes.

"I want to help them to understand they are capable of accomplishing their goals," St. George-Sorel said.

